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THE POUR HOUSE

Apple of My Eye



Once America's favorite beverage, fall-friendly cider is making a big comeback. Just don't call it "juice."

By Joshua M. Bernstein

America is a proud, beer-guzzling nation, but as recently as 150 years ago, the country's preferred alcoholic quaff was cider.

While neither grapes nor grain grew well in the rocky New England soil, apple seeds brought over by Colonial settlers easily took root, providing plenty of fermentable raw ingredients. Cider was easily and cheaply produced, offering a hygienic alternative to often unsafe water.

Cider's reign ended in the mid-nineteenth century, due to several factors: The temperance movement demonized excessive drinking, and German immigrants began making crisp, elegant lagers in the urban cities where they settled. (Cider production was confined to farms.) The final blow was Prohibition. When the sober blanket was lifted, "cider" became synonymous with "apple juice."

Yet in recent years, America's cider industry has undergone a revival, as farmers, former brewers, and fermentationists have begun creating flavorful ciders of uncommon complexity and, pleasantly, precious little sweetness. "There are so many similarities between cider and where craft beer was in the eighties," says Greg Hall, who was formerly the boundary-pushing brewmaster at Chicago's Goose Island.

Hall's new cider venture, Virtue Brands, embodies his experimental nature. His crisp, subtly oaky Red-

Streak cider is fermented with a trio of yeast strains and partly barrel-aged, while the tart Lapinette is fully aged in French oak, and the Mitten slumbers in 12-year-old bourbon barrels. "I want to apply the techniques I learned in brewing to cider production," says Hall.

In New Hampshire, Farnum Hill's husband-and-wife duo Stephen Wood and Louisa Spencer rely on rare heirloom apples and ugly, inedible cider apples that are prized for their sugars, acids, and tannins. These apples create Farnum Hill's dry, sharp, and aromatic ciders, which are sold in corked champagne bottles.

Down in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains, Foggy Ridge cider maker Diane Flynt relies on more than 30 English, American, and French apple varieties to fashion flavorful ciders, such as the lively First Fruit and the crisply refreshing Serious Cider. In Salem, Oregon, Wandering Aengus Ciderworks produces the full-bodied Wanderlust, which is aged in French-oak casks. Long-running cider brands like Original Sin and Woodchuck have started rolling out unusual single-variety and barrel-aged ciders.

But the surest sign of cider's arrival can be found in suds-mad Portland, Oregon. There, the city recently welcomed the country's first cider brewpub, Bushwhacker Cider, which makes a portion of its product from apples fallen from Portland trees. "You can't do that with hops or barley," enthuses Hall. ☪



FOGGY RIDGE'S SWEET STAYMAN

The state's famous Virginia Stayman apples are blended with several different heirloom varieties to create the perfect crisp companion to fiery food.

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